

Executive Summary

When awarded in 1997, USAID Mali prefaced the cooperative agreement with the following:

The 1996-2002 strategic plan focuses on four highly interrelated strategic objectives within the social, economic, and political realms: Youth, Sustainable Economic Growth, and Democratic Governance Strategic Objectives and a Special Objective Information and Communication, all contributing to USAID Mali's Program Goal: Mali achieves a level of sustainable economic, social, and political development that eliminates the need for concessional foreign assistance.

In order to achieve the stated objectives, USAID Mali decided to use technically qualified PVOs which offer synergy and provide direct quality services to grassroots populations in the appropriate geographic areas. The purpose of this Cooperative Agreement is to provide support to Save the Children for implementing this USAID Mali integrated program in the circles of Kolondieba and Bougouni, Sikasso region, Mali.

Thus, Save the Children was awarded an agreement which included six major activities, all of which significantly supported one another. The results of this endeavor, as reported in the following final report, successfully reflect the vision and ambition of these objectives. As noted in each of these final reports, there is not one sector which didn't benefit from multiple opportunities for synergy with the other sectors. ***The institutionalization of this synergy under one umbrella grant has been key to the work with the rural, marginalized and very poor populations of the Kolondieba and Bougouni districts of the Sikasso region.***

It is clear that the community organizations, whether market gardening groups, community school management committees, or village health committees, have greatly benefited from support of the *Democratic Governance* team as well as from the opportunities provided through SEG support to *Soro Yiriwaso* and the *Commercial Gardening* activities. Mothers with loans and income generating activities can better afford to let their children, particularly girls, go to school. Opportunities for economic improvement enable activities for the community well-being to flourish.

Reflecting back on the life of this cooperative agreement, we are proud, too, of the sheer scope of activity, particularly given that so many aspects of the work involved one-on-one contacts in remote communities. 804 community schools were built which meant that 804 school management committees were mobilized, nearly 50,000 school books procured and 1,332 teachers were trained in learner-centered methodology. The *Democratic Governance* team worked with 734 community organizations. *Groupe Pivot/Santé Population* touched close to a million people in nearly 600 communities. The *Commercial Gardening* activity created 220

gardens (each with two dug wells), which now produce 1,204 tons of vegetables. Soro Yiriwaso has a total of 9,707 active loans with a growth rate of about 25%/year. So much of this achievement is based on one-on-one communication and regular visits to hard-to-reach places over sometimes non-existent roads and reflects the extraordinary commitment of staff and partners. As Ali Cissé (DG Team/ USAID Mali) eloquently said in the Lessons Learned section his evaluation report of April, 2003:

“The performance of a program (achievement of pre-established goals/objectives) and the impact of a program (positive changes brought about by program interventions), particularly in the area of DG, depend to a large extent on field agents who are in direct and regular contact with beneficiaries. Their positions do not appear on fancy organizational charts submitted to USAID by implementing partners, but they hold the key for the success of a program.”

We couldn't agree more!...and this was shown time and time again in each of the activities. In December 2002, Save the Children, through other sources of funding supported a study of the keys to Groupe Pivot's phenomenal success in contraceptive use. As Mr. Cissé observed, what was documented by the study was that **the success has largely been due to the heart and commitment of individual community based distribution agents**—to see if a woman was using her pills properly, (and to accept in-kind payment), to remind her to come for a Depo shot, etc. And through Groupe Pivot's very personal and supportive supervisory visits, CSCom staff slowly changed their approach to a more client-oriented one so that people are encouraged to make the effort to come in for pre- and post-natal visits, and other essential services. This has made GP/SP supported CSComs stand out as models of positive examples in Mali.

Save the Children's role in all of these accomplishments has been to provide the model and support to ensure that these one-on-one connections happened and were sustained.

The total amount obligated to this cooperative agreement by USAID was \$25,632,597. Matching funds generated more than \$9,190,192 and brought the total life of project value to more than \$34,822,789.

We reflect back on the intent of this cooperative agreement when it was conceived and accorded – to provide access to education, health, and economic opportunity to marginalized populations in the third region....and to empower them to express their voices in matters affecting their lives. The results noted in this report reflect the collaboration amongst all of the stakeholders of this cooperative agreement: USAID, Save the Children, Malian NGO partners, Malian officials, other PVOs, and, most of all, the communities in which we have worked. The power of the results is an affirmation of those partnerships.